

WASHINGTON - Congressman Steny Hoyer announced that the House of Representatives included \$3 million in the Fiscal Year 2004 Energy and Water funding bill for the Oyster Restoration Project which is coordinating the revival of oysters in the bay. To date, Hoyer has helped obtain more than \$18 million in federal funding for the program.

"Just last week I joined the Oyster Recovery Partnership to lay a new oyster sanctuary in the Patuxent River that is expected to raise close to 1 million new oysters. Two years ago, we planted about 5 million spat (juvenile oysters) on another site close to Trent Hall Farm and since 2000, the Oyster Recovery Partnership has planted over 334 million spat at 33 locations in the Chesapeake Bay," said Congressman Hoyer.

"On these and many other occasions, I have been witness to the strength and quality of the Oyster Recovery Partnership and the progress that is made when dedicated individuals come together to realize an important goal. I am pleased that I have been able to join this Partnership to secure \$3 million dollars in the bill passed today, as we have for the past several years, and I will continue to play an active role to improve the health of the oyster population and increase the ecological benefits of the Chesapeake Bay," added Hoyer.

The Oyster Restoration Project is working to create both managed harvest reserves and oyster sanctuaries which will provide in coming years a fresh supply of oysters for the watermen and the entire oyster industry infrastructure: shucking houses, businesses that serve harvesters and processors, and restaurants. The oyster reef structures that will be created thanks to this effort will provide critical habitat and feeding grounds for other essential species, and will also serve as natural filters screening out algae, sediments, and pollutants. Unfortunately, due to disease, pollution, and over fishing, oyster populations are only about two percent of their levels just a century ago.

The Governors of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, the Mayor of the District of Columbia, and the EPA Administrator have agreed to work together to increase the oyster population in the Bay ten-fold by 2010. The entire cost of the Oyster Recovery Project through 2010 is expected to be \$75 million, with \$50 million being provided by the federal government and \$25 million from the state of Maryland.

The Oyster Recovery Program is undertaken jointly by the Oyster Recovery Partnership (a non-profit that coordinates the efforts of the government agencies), the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Maryland

Department of Natural Resources and the University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Sciences.

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